

Congress Must Act to Prevent Dangerous Food Borne Illness Outbreaks!

FDA Needs Tools Necessary to Effectively Respond to Food Safety Incidents in this Nation

Dear Colleague:

Continued incidences of food-borne illness including over 575 cases in 43 states of people sickened in a national *Salmonella* outbreak call for Congress to take action to maintain the safety and security of our nation's food supply.

On January 29, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commenting on the recent food safety outbreak, highlighted flaws in federal food safety process noting, “*Steps to mitigate Salmonella contamination in the facility failed to be taken. Because of these deficiencies, potentially contaminated products may be in the marketplace or in consumers' homes.*” These vulnerabilities in food safety laws show that we must expand the tools of the FDA to more effectively respond to food safety incidents in this nation.

To address vulnerabilities in our nation’s ability to adequately safeguard our food supply, we will shortly introduce ***The Safe Food Enforcement, Assessment, Standards and Targeting Act***, SAFE Feast Act, comprehensive food safety legislation to strengthening preventative measures with new science-based food safety requirements, while expanding the tools of the Food and Drug administration (FDA) to more effectively respond to food safety incidents in this nation.

Although the American food supply continues to be one of the safest in the world, our governing food safety authorities are outdated and must be strengthened to ensure the highest level of food safety standards, both for goods produced domestically and those imported from abroad. In addition, new mandatory food safety requirements are needed all along the food chain - from farm, harvest, processing, packing, distribution to retail outlet, and finally to consumers - to identify and prevent potential sources of food-borne illness.

In fact, a January 22, 2009 report by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) Highlights HIGH-RISK SERIES Revamping Federal Oversight of Food Safety (GAO-09-271) recommended enactment of “*comprehensive, uniform, and risk-based food safety legislation.*” The Report noted, “*unplanned events like food-borne outbreaks have caused FDA to provide limited oversight of domestic and imported fresh produce as well as delay key safety actions, such as updating regulations and guidance.*”

Implementing the principles of risk assessment and risk management, our bipartisan bill will strengthen the relationship between federal and state agencies to better control food safety threats, filling the gaps in inter-agency communication, and reducing the time needed to identify and trace a contaminant. The bill requires all domestic and foreign food companies selling food in U.S. to conduct a food safety risk analysis that identifies potential sources of contamination, outline appropriate food safety controls, and require verification that the food safety controls implemented are adequate to address the risks of food-borne contamination.

To improve safeguards in our food supply to identify and prevent potential sources of food-borne illness, the legislation also carries out GAO’s recommendation to grant FDA, for first time, powers to recall contaminated food in the case of adulteration, as well as expanded authority to issue preventive controls and verify implementation. The bill also increases inspection frequency for all facilities, maximizing effectiveness by mandating greatest inspection frequency for high risk facilities.

To ensure that food products coming into the United States from international sources are safe, imported goods would have to adhere to the same safety and quality standards as set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), documenting the food safety measures and controls for FDA review.

Finally, the bill would grant FDA authority to access food safety production records during emergencies and deny importation of goods if strict food safety standards are not met and directs the agency to adopt a risk-based approach to inspections, giving greater scrutiny to facilities posing greater risk.

Join us in protecting America’s food supply by giving FDA the tools needed to prevent and more effectively respond to food safety incidents in our country.

Sincerely,

JIM COSTA
Member of Congress

ADAM PUTNAM
Member of Congress